DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 169 433 CG 013 375

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TITLE Education for Parenthood: A Present Priority.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 19p.; Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Programs; Elementary School Students; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family Life Education; *Parenthood Education; *Parent School Relationship; *School Responsibility; School Social Workers; Secondary School Students; *Student Needs

ABSTRACT

Education for parenthood is seen as an urgent priority in this paper, which presents a rationale and methods for implementation. National symptoms relating to family problems, teenage parents, mental health, crime, venereal disease, and child abuse are described, and existing preventive efforts in many areas are discussed. Problems facing educators in implementing programs are considered, but powerful sources of assistance are delineated and procedures for initiating and developing education for parenthood programs are described. Concepts and content for a coordinated parenting curriculum are suggested, depending on the readiness of diverse communities. The role of the school social worker as advocate of a healthy balance between cognitive and affective education is also set forth, and the importance of this role is stressed. (Author)

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Title:

EDUCATION FOR PARENTHOOD: A PRESENT PRIORITY

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ABSTRACT

Education for Parenthood: A Present Priority

This paper presents education for parenthood as an urgent priority for the present. National symptoms relating to family problems, teenage parents, mental health, crime, venereal disease, and child abuse are described and existing preventive efforts in many areas are discussed.

Education for parenthood is presented as a basic preventive strategy. Problems facing educators in implementing programs -- especially those considered "private and personal" -- are considered, but powerful sources of assistance are delineated and procedures for initiating and developing education for parenthood programs are described. Concepts and content for a coordinated parenting curriculum are suggested, depending on the readiness of diverse communities.

School social workers have important roles to play in defining and advocating for a healthy balance between cognitive and affective education. Contributing to the individual well being and adjustment of youth and to the understanding of the responsibilities of parenthood for the pupils in school today will be reflected and compounded in our society tomorrow.

A thoughtful, well-planned, and coordinated effort to provide realistic education for parenthood throughout the levels of the educational program incorporates the promise of augmenting the force of education on the lives of our citizens and reducing the multiple and disastrous social problems which will beset present and future parents and their children in our society. The rationale and methods of implementing education for parenthood are the subject of this paper.

Education for Parenthood: A Present Priority

School social workers lead very interesting lives, don't you agree? One hot August day in Kansas before school had started, I walked up to a school building and saw where the custodian had blocked off a patch of recently repaired sidewalk. Inside the barrier were several large foot-prints in the still wet concrete. The custodian was running across the playground chasing several kids and waving his arms and yelling at them. When he gave up the chase and returned to visit with me, I said, "Mr. Brown, I thought you loved kids and were a friend to all of them. You seem pretty upset." He laughed and said, "Mrs. Cook, I do love them, but in the abstract and not in the concrete."

We school social workers know quite a bit about the concrete kids. We know, for example, that about a half a million teenagers run away each year in the United States. We know that more than half of all serious crimes in the United States are committed by youths aged ten to 17. Last year in Chicago, one-third of all murders were committed by people aged 20 or younger, a 29% jump over 1975. More girls are getting involved in violent crime. From 1970 to 1975 the arrest rate of girls under 18 for serious offenses climbed 40% in contrast to 24% for boys. And the FBI reports that last year about 70,000 teachers were assaulted in U.S. schools and the cost of vandalism reached $600 million. That amount of school money would pay the salaries for a lot of teachers, or, better yet, school social workers.

Between 1968 and 1975 suicides of youth between 15 and 24 years old doubled, amounting to 5,000 per year.[1] Accidents and suicides are the leading causes of death among teenagers. Isn't that a shocking waste? About 600,000 teenagers give birth each year -- one of every five deliveries in the U.S. One out of every ten 17 year old girls in the U.S. is a mother and at least 16% of these girls have more than one child. The mortality

rate for infants born to mothers under 15 is more than twice as high as for infants born to mothers in their early twenties. Additional stress in American families is due to the birth defects that strike 1 in 12 infants born in this country every year and that have already affected the daily lives of 15 million Americans.

While the birth rate has declined dramatically for other age groups in the U.S., it has remained constant among girls 14 to 17 and has actually increased among those under 14. Even in conservative agrarian Kansas there were about 100 babies born to mothers 10 to 14 years old in 1975.[2]

About 90% of unmarried mothers keep their babies. Only 29% of the one million abortions performed each year have been performed in those private hospitals in which the Supreme Court and HEW now absolutely guarantee the right of a woman who can afford it to have an abortion on demand. In a recent cartoon, a judge explains the situation to a pregnant teenager. "Young lady, if you could afford to have children, you could afford to have an abortion."

Two million concrete kids 19 and under contracted venereal disease last year. Almost half of the women divorced each year married while in their teens. More than one in every six children under 18 lives in a single parent home, a percentage almost double that in 1950. Of the 3.2 million children in families with incomes of less than $5,000, 60% live in single parent homes. One-third of America's children do not receive adequate health care, including access to primary care, complete immunizations, and prompt and early treatment of disease.

Perhaps the most disturbing facts about our concrete kids are those related to child abuse and neglect. It is incredible but true that in 1975 two thousand children in the U.S. died as a result of abuse and that another million were abused or neglected.[3] Of all the people

in prison today, 80% were abused as children. Could there be a connection there? Child abuse, teenage parents, the venereal disease epidemic, and the youth crime plague are all interrelated. They are also very much a part of "our bag" as school social workers and as educators.

We can and do philosophize about the causes of these distressing symptoms in our society and parents are often blamed. It serves no purpose, however, to find scapegoats and point fingers when we, perhaps more than any other single group of people, recognize the complexities of causation and the variety of cultural, physical, mental, economic, and social variables that are involved. Energies directed toward preventive measures must have priority over the band-aiding that demands so much of our time. I get tired of trying to empty the ocean with a teaspoon, don't you? And, besides that, it isn't a cost-effective approach!

School social workers have skillful allies in preventive approaches to our social problems. Colleagues in many areas of both the private and the public sectors have identified unmet needs and have developed varieties of programs ranging from area vocational schools to public low-cost housing, from unemployment insurance to crisis hot lines, from community mental health centers to community based correctional homes, from family planning clinics to child protection teams. All of these programs help to alleviate pain for many people and to prevent problems for others.

The program I am advocating today certainly is not a panacea nor is it really new. But it is a long way from being universally accepted. Both the extended family and many hospitals have provided varying kinds of training for parenthood, and stable, happy families have provided the best training ground of all for the lucky children growing up in them. The public school system, however, which is the one institution in our society serving most of our families and most of our future parents, has defaulted in providing education for parenthood and also in even recognizing that it has any serious responsibility in this area.

Defining the responsibilities of educators is tough these days. I recently heard one school administrator complain, saying, "Good grief! We do everything now except bed them down at night!" Maybe we do try to do too many things. Regardless of how you feel about that, we can all agree that we must set priorities. I submit to you that education for parenthood must be one of our priorities for the present.

Have you read the philosophy of education for your school district recently during a pause between crises? The philosophy of education for USD 497 in Lawrence, Kansas, where I work, states that pupils "should be provided with a stimulating environment and opportunities for learning experiences designed to develop them intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally -- to their optimum level" so that each one may be a self-sufficient person and a responsible citizen. Responsible citizenship surely includes responsible parenthood for those who are or will be parents, although I did hear a couple of concrete kids say the other day that bringing up children is too important to be left to parents. And, of course, there are some responsible citizens who do not have children. One recently wrote to our welfare department that she has no children yet since her husband is a truck driver and works day and night.

One of our colleagues, Lillian B. Frahme, wrote about the purposes of education in an article called "The Hand that Rocks the Cradle" for the 1974 Handbook of School Social Work. "The purpose of education, then, should be geared to the production of adults capable of functioning as mature, constructive, loving people. Among the most basic needs of human beings are healthy family life, ethics, integrity, human dignity, self-control and a reverence for life itself. These are not just sentimental

notions or artificial ideals to be foisted on us. This is what civilization is all about, and this is what education should be all about.[4]

Schools have traditionally emphasized the importance of helping children to master the basic skills they will need for a lifetime of functioning. Critics of education claim we need to rededicate ourselves to this function -- that the plummeting national test scores and increasing numbers of high school graduates who cannot read or write well require elimination of frills and concentration on reading, writing, and arithmetic. The demand for competency based testing is being reflected in legislative action.

The importance of skills in our technological society must not be underestimated. But school social workers, and many other educators as well, know that skills alone are of little value. The way our pupils feel about themselves and about other people is basic to effective, efficient, and successful utilization of skills. Very probably, you can't have one without the other.

So not only must we examine priorities, we must also search for a balance in order to meet the goals we set for ourselves. Charles E. Silberman recognized the difficulties when he wrote in Crisis in the Classroom, "Finding the right balance is never easy; there will always be a certain tension between two groups of educational objectives -- those concerned with individual growth and fulfillment, and those concerned with the transmission of specific skills, intellectual disciplines, and bodies of knowledge -- and finding the right balance is neither easy nor obvious."[5]

So we recognize that education for parenthood is not a panacea and that we must maintain some sort of balance between cognitive and affective education in our schools. Then why should school social workers be asked to advocate for education for parenthood? Is it really important, and, if so, at what level should it be taught? What should the course content be? And who should do the teaching? What should we do first?

One of the first things we must do is to help people -- including school board members, administrators, teachers at all levels, parents, and our young people -- to help these people recognize what they already know: that many children and families are in trouble today and that both the public schools and other community agencies have responsibilities to develop programs directed not only to the alleviation of problems but also to the prevention of problems.

A poet wrote that "The childhood shows the man, As morning shows the day."[6] Dr. Terrell Bell, a former U.S. Commissioner of Education, said it more bluntly in addressing parents. "Remember that your home can greatly compensate for deficiencies that may occur other places in the life of your child. But is is very difficult for any individual or institution to compensate for failure in the home."[7]

The family is the most significant influence on the development of the individual. Parenting is left to chance, however, and to the confusing bombardment of solicited and unsolicited advice parents receive from friends and relatives, books and magazines, newspapers and television. Parents, nonetheless, are usually held responsible for whatever successes or failures their children experience. "Parents are blamed, but not trained. Millions of new mothers and fathers take on a job each year that ranks among the most difficult anyone can have, taking an infant, a little person who is almost totally helpless, assuming full responsibility for his physical and psychological health and raising him so he will become a productive, cooperative, and contributing citizen. What more difficult and demanding job is there?"[8]

Basic to parenting is the way in which the parents themselves were treated as children. "These childhood experiences are profound and

provide lasting imprints which are revealed in the way adults feel about themselves and their children. In . . . a crisis of insecurity, they repeat what they learned in childhood about how parents behave. . . ."[9]

This, of course, is the reason research has indicated that the majority of abusive parents were themselves abused as children. So it is important how the six million Americans who will have children this year will raise their children. The parenting skills demonstrated by these new mothers and fathers will have a greater impact on our society than the way they vote, the technologies they produce, the work they do, or the art they create.

Educators must, then, assume some responsibility for training for parenthood, and this training must be from Kindergarten through grade 12, and must reinforce such programs through making available family life education in continuing education programs for adults as well as by supporting other community efforts such as hospital prenatal and postnatal courses, TV spots on child-rearing principles, and coordinated programs for foster parents. The concepts which need to be included in such training will affect positively areas of society other than parenting but will be basic to healthy family relationships and child development. Some of these topics are the importance of loving and being loved, the necessity for physical and intellectual stimulation, knowledge of approximate developmental milestones to prevent unrealistic expectations, the benefits of predictability and organization in the home environment, the requirements for adequate nutrition and health care, the mutual benefits for children and parents of feelings of self-worth and acceptance and individual dignity. Other concepts of importance are the use of structure and rules with meaning, respecting and encouraging children, using logical consequences instead of arbitrary punishment and rewards,

tolerance for individual differences, and sharing a variety of experiences and having fun together. Reproductive information, still neglected in many of our schools, must be included and repeated at regular intervals throughout the educational sequence.

As realists we recognize the time and other resource constraints and demands which infringe on our school curricula. We also recognize that the knowledge required for parents to be effective cannot be transmitted in a one or two semester course at the junior or senior high school level. Comprehensive education for parenthood must be integrated into the total educational experience and must also be sequential and continous, for if it is sporadic or fragmented, it will be ineffective.

In schools where older pupils are given responsibilities as tutors, teacher aides, or playground and lunchroom moderators, teachers and administrators can help the more mature pupils to learn about patience and the needs of their younger friends. In secondary schools, providing student opportunities for realistic involvement in appropriately supervised field activities with young children provides an excellent means of developing and recognizing alternative ways of behaving and for developing theoretical principles as well. Males as well as females must be included in education for parenthood and the approach should be interdisciplinary. If education for parenthood is assigned unilaterally to school nurses, social science teachers, the home ec department, or school social workers, valuable available resources may be eliminated. The subject is too important and too broad for pride of territory to limit the instructional possibilities.

In addition to the concepts previously mentioned, the sequence must include at the junior high or the high school level specific information

concerning family planning alternatives and the biological factors of human reproduction, influences of heredity and environment, prenatal and postnatal care, infant care, child growth and development, individual differences in children, parental roles and responsibilities, human sexuality and responsible sexual behavior, community resources and child care arrangements.[10] Marriage, divorce, and alternative life styles should be included, too, but what will work in one community may not be acceptable in another one.

Where can we go for help in such an undertaking? It is reassuring for us to know that we have some powerful allies ready to assist us. Some school districts have developed programs that they are willing to share -- and the U.S. Commissioner of Education, the Director of the Office of Child Development, the National Institute of Mental Health, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the National Parent Teacher Association, and the National Foundation of the March of Dimes have materials and consultants available to all of us. What you help to develop in your own communities will be responsive to particular needs and standards.

We have very little to lose and much to gain by advocating for and working on this present priority. But we also have large responsibilities to shoulder. Without our leadership there is scant chance for success in implementing first class education for parenthood programs. While we will not propose licensing for parents, we will continue to insist that the parental role is more crucial in our society than that of a licensed pilot, a licensed barber, a licensed engineer, or even a licensed social worker.

To review, some important steps in implementing a program of education for parenthood are:

Number One -- Survey your school district to find what is already being done. You will probably be pleasantly surprised to discover that you have a solid base for growth and expansion. This will also help you to identify key staff members who may assist in program development and focus.

Number Two -- Identify the materials already in your school districts related to affective development, the broad areas of health, family life, and community resources. Listing these books, film strips, videotapes, and other materials together with their call numbers and their location will facilitate their use.

Number Three -- Talk it up. Share the symptomatic statistics I have shared with you and that you deal with every day at work. Convince all of the diverse groups of people you know that present and future parents need information and help with their tough and complex responsibilities.

Number Four -- Examine the materials that are available from the U.S. Office of Education, the Parenting Materials Information Center, the Education Development Center, Incorporated, or school districts you may know who are ahead of some of us.

Number Five -- Attend a conference on Parenting in your region, if possible. The National PTA and the National Foundation March of Dimes are organizing them in many areas.

Number Six -- Ask your administrator to form a committee to adapt materials to meet your local needs and mores. Utilize the expertise of other professionals and of parents and youth in your community.

Number Seven -- Select some pilot schools or teachers to "try it out" so your program can be improved, amended, or replaced.

Number Eight -- Demand that in-service be required for teachers so that efforts are sequential, sustained, and consistent. In-service training should also be directed toward helping teachers to be good models who emphasize the positive and who remember that "prople are not for hitting and children are people, too."

Number Nine -- Be willing to participate and help all along the way, continually working to improve what is good and to eliminate what is not effective.

Number Ten -- Support and assist non-school based programs. You will be helping "the cause" and may learn something to improve school-based programs.

Number Eleven -- Hang in there!

The roles we play in contributing to the individual well-being and adjustment of pupils in school today will be reflected and compounded in our society tomorrow. Our work provides the ultimate in responsibility, opportunity, and satisfaction, for by serving others, we also recreate ourselves.

No peace lies in the future
which is not hidden
in this present instant.[11]

FOOTNOTES

1. "The Youth Crime Plague," Time, July 11, 1977, pp. 18-28.

   Richard Saltus, "Teenage Suicides on Rise," Associated Press, Topeka Daily Capital, Sept. 1, 1977, p. 13.

2. "Pregnant Teens," Newsweek, May 30, 1977, pp. 54-57.

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3. Governor's Conference on Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, Wichita, Kansas, October 13, 14, 15, 1976.

   U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Child Abuse and Neglect, 3 Vol., 1975.

4. Lillian B. Frahme, "The Hand that Rocks the Cradle," Handbook of School Social Work, Remediation Associates, Inc., 1974, p. 14.

5. Charles E. Silberman, Crisis in the Classroom, Random House, N.Y., 1970, p. 322.

6. John Milton, Paradise Regained.

7. John Douglas, "Parents Help Children Learn," Topeka Daily Capital, Sept. 8, 1977, p. 22.

8. Thomas Gordon, Parent Effectiveness Training, Peter H. Wyden, Inc., N.Y., 1970, pp. 1,2.

9. C. Henry Kempe, M.D. and Ray E. Helfer, M.D., Helping the Battered Child and His Family, J.B. Lippincott, Co., Philadelphia, 1972, p.5.

10. W. Stanley Kruger, U.S. Office of Education, "Education for Parenthood and School-Age Parents," presented at American School Health Assn. Convention, Chicago, Oct. 13, 1973.

11. Fra. Giovanni, 1513.

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Some Sources of Information Concerning Parenting Education

Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
Office of Education
Washington, D.C. 20202

Parenting Materials Information Center
Early Childhood Division
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory
211 East 7th Street
Austin, Texas 73701

PAR Leadership Training Foundation
464 Central
Northfield, Illinois 60093

E.C. Brown Foundation
The Family: Education and Research
710 S.W. Second Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204

Metropolitan Life Insurance Company
One Madison Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10010

## PROFESSIONAL POSITION OF THE UNITED SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS OF KANSAS ON EDUCATION FOR PARENTING

Child abuse and neglect is a national epidemic. Data indicate that there were 1,000,000 cases of suspected child abuse and neglect in the United States in 1976...2,000 children died and 16 of those deaths were in Kansas. Over 8,000 suspected cases were reported in this state during the past year.

Present knowledge indicates that 90% of identified abusive parents could have become nurturing, responsible parents if they had had access to basic, effective parenting skills. The optimum time for acquiring such parenting skills is prior to parenthood, during a child's own developmental process. Appropriate education at the child's developmental level would contribute to the child's future parenting abilities and thereby help to prevent future child abuse.

Therefore, the United School Administrators of Kansas endorses the goal of the Citizen's Commission on Education for Parenting to encourage the introduction of Education for Parenting in the school curriculum.

The immediate steps to accomplish this goal are to:

1. Enlist the support and participation of state and local agencies and organizations concerned with public education.
2. Identify and/or create various kinds of model programs.
3. Design curriculum materials based on model programs.
4. Encourage pre-service training and develop in-service training to equip professional and support staff to implement such programs.
5. Create community support for such programs.

Only with the approval of local school districts can such a plan for prevention of child abuse and neglect be implemented. Therefore, the United School Administrators of Kansas will participate with the Citizen's Commission on Education for Parenting and the groups and organizations involved in offering assistance and support to local school districts.

Adopted 9-15-77 by the USA Representative Assembly.